

Aquaculture rules updated

BY SUSANNA SHEEHAN
CLIPPER STAFF

The Board of Selectmen unanimously approved an update to the aquaculture regulations that now makes it legal for Duxbury's oyster growers to use a float or barge to process their harvested oysters.

The amendment to section 8.2 of current aquaculture regulations clarifies the law's language and allows anyone with a shellfish license to also "maintain a float, barge, or boat for processing purposes within the same growing area of the bay" listed on the licensed area. It also states that when the floats are used that they will be considered to be part of the licensed area and not be considered off site.

According to Duxbury Harbormaster Don Beers, this update to the laws brings it in line with what has been taking place on Duxbury Bay for many years. "This is a practice we've done in Duxbury for the last five, if not more, years," Beers said. "It allows the oyster growers to leave their leases and go to floats to process their shellfish and cull their shellfish and then ship them off to market." Beers said the state's Division of Marine Fisheries wanted this practice approved and codified in the town's laws.

"I'm totally in favor of it," Beer said, noting that the amendment was unanimously approved by the Shellfish Advisory committee.

Shellfisherman and Aquaculture Advisory committee member John Brawley explained that the new law brings the town in compliance with what the state wants.

"Currently, Mass. general laws really restrict what we do out there to our license areas," he said. "What the Division of Marine Fisheries needs is to have this section 8.2 incorporated into the town's regulations to have these floats be consistent with the licensed areas." "This is all about the word landed," noted Selectman Shawn Dahlen. "On floats, the oysters 'are not officially landed.' They are still in the process of being harvested until they hit pavement at Mattakeesett court." "The Vibrio management plan is what is really driving this change," said Beers. Vibrio Parahaemolyticus is a bacteria found in shellfish that can cause severe food poisoning and also lead to infection and hospitalization for people with a weakened immune system.

In August 2013, Department of Public Health and Division of Marine Fisheries closed down oyster beds in Plymouth, Kingston, Duxbury, and Marshfield because Vibrio was found. It was later linked to oysters harvested in some of these areas.

The state responded to this outbreak by updating its regulations to combat the spread of Vibrio, which occurs naturally in marine environments and is more common when seawater temperatures rise. The new regulations require that oysters are iced within two hours of the time of harvest and be cooled to 50 degrees or less to avoid bacterial growth.

Cases of Vibrio are rare but are on the rise. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a report last Friday warning of an increase in the cases of Vibrio. Vibrio poisonings rose 52 percent between the 2006-2008 period and the 2011-2013 period.

According to the CDC, “a dozen species (of *Vibrio* bacteria) are known to cause disease in humans accounting for an estimated 80,000 illnesses, 500 hospitalizations and 100 deaths each year in the United States.”